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ABSTRACT

Motivating aspects and stress factors of teaching were identified in a study of public school teachers in suburban New York (state) and New Jersey schools. Thirty percent (398) of the teachers contacted participated in the study, which consisted of a 65-item questionnaire, the Teacher Attitudes Survey, adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The most satisfactory experiences for the teachers were those that made them feel sensitive to and involved with their students and committed to and competent in their jobs. Relationships with their colleagues, families, and friends also were important. Sources of stress were excessive paperwork, unsuccessful administrative meetings, and lack of advancement opportunities. Three major factors emerged as a result of factor analysis with varimax rotations: (1) general feelings of burnout; (2) commitment to the teaching profession; and (3) working closely with students. Few significant subgroup differences were apparent among the teachers. The results of the survey are significant, although limited by the location of the schools, the representative nature of the sample, and the lack of longitudinal data. (FG)

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Stress and Burnout: Implications for Teacher Motivation

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Stress and Burnout: Implications for Teacher Motivation

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the satisfactions and stresses of teachers, with particular reference to identifying factors which either impede or promote teacher burnout.

In recent years teacher stress and burnout have become topics of increasing public and professional concern. The 1979 National Education Association (NEA) poll, for example, noted that 1/3 of teachers surveyed stated that if they were "starting over again" they would not choose to become teachers (Nationwide teacher opinion poll, 1979), and only 60% of teachers report that they plan to remain in the profession until retirement (McGuire, 1979). Further evidence of disillusionment is supplied by the fact that whereas in 1961, 28% of all teachers had 20 years of experience, by 1976 that number had been reduced in half (DuBrin, Fowler, Hoiberg, Mathiott, Morrison, Paulus, Prince, Stein & Youngs, 1979). There is a 10% dropout rate from the profession each year and, in fact, only 59% of teachers last more than four years in the classroom (Mark & Anderson, 1978). It is also notable that a substantial proportion of teachers--41% in New York, 56.7% in Chicago--report physical and/or mental distress as a direct consequence of their work (Cichon & Koff, 1978; "Stress," 1980). The president of the NEA suggests that as a result of burnout, "thousands of sensitive, thoughtful, and dedicated teachers . . . are abandoning the profession" (McGuire, 1979, p. 5). Finally, teacher trainers report that burnout is often the highest rated subject on needs assessment measures designed to identify major teacher concerns (Shaw, Bensky & Dixon, 1981). In short, the impact of stress and burnout on the quality and consistency of education is easily imagined and clearly serious.

Burnout may be defined as a "progressive loss of idealism, energy, purpose, and concern as a result of conditions of work" (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980). In general, burnout is a function of feeling inconsequential--feeling that no matter how hard one works, the payoffs in terms of accomplishment, recognition, or appreciation are not there. For example, it has been shown that when teachers' needs for self-actualization and self-esteem are unfulfilled there is a higher probability of burnout (Anderson & Iwanicki, 1981). Other literature has suggested that teacher burnout is the result of such stresses as student discipline problems, student apathy, overcrowded classrooms and shortage of available support staff, excessive paperwork, excessive testing, involuntary transfers, inadequate salaries, lack of promotional opportunities, demanding parents, lack of administrative support, role conflict and role ambiguity, and public criticism of teachers (Alshuler, 1980; Cichon & Koff, 1978; Dillon, 1978; Dunham, 1977; Feshbach & Campbell, 1978; Henrickson, 1979; Hunter, 1977; Johnson, 1979; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977, 1978; Lortie, 1975; Pratt, 1978; Reed, 1979; Scrivens, 1979). Predispositional factors may also contribute to teacher burnout. Bloch (1977), for example, reports that teachers who are obsessional, passionate, idealistic, and dedicated (as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory) are more prone to "battered teachers syndrome." Teachers who become burned out may be less sympathetic toward students, may have a lower tolerance for frustration in the classroom, may plan for their classes less often or less carefully, may fantasize or actually plan on leaving the profession, may feel frequently emotionally or physically exhausted, may feel anxious, irritable, depressed, and in general, may feel less committed and dedicated to their work (Farber & Miller, 1981).

Despite increased public and professional attention to the problems of stress and burnout, there has been a notable paucity of adequate empirical investigation. Much of the literature bearing on the problem of teacher burnout is anecdotal; in addition, the literature often confuses or equates "stress" with "burnout." Though these two concepts are similar, they are not identical. Stress may have both positive and negative effects (Selye, 1976); indeed, a certain amount of stress is necessary to motivate action. Moreover, burnout is most often the result not of stress per se (which may be inevitable in teaching) but of unmediated stress--of being stressed and having no "out," no buffers, no support system, no adequate rewards. In this regard too, the literature has paid far too little attention to identifying those counterbalancing factors--those rewards--that do motivate teachers to continue in their profession despite the stresses.

With these methodological and conceptual issues in mind, the present study was designed to identify motivating aspects of teaching as well as stressful ones. The research method employed, following Maslach (1978), was directed away from identifying "good" or "bad" teachers and toward uncovering those characteristics of schools and classrooms that affect teachers in either functional or dysfunctional ways.

Method

Sample

A total of 398 public school teachers, drawn primarily from school districts in Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess Counties, in New York, participated in this study. The sample consisted of 266 female and 132 male teachers. These teachers were primarily white (95%); and married (69.3%); their average age was 39.6.

They had been employed as teachers an average of 13.5 years, 10.1 years in their present schools. Many (37.7%) had other careers prior to teaching. There was a representative range of teachers in each grade level from Kindergarten through high school. Most (nearly 90%) taught in communities that they described as either "suburban" or "small town." Most (91.2%) belonged to a Teacher's Union.

Procedure

Union representatives from school districts in the lower Hudson Valley in New York State were contacted in regard to potential participation of their schools in the study; a total of 12 school districts agreed to participate. One school district from New Jersey also participated in the study. In order to monitor teachers' perceptions of their work experience over the course of the school year, teachers were asked to complete the Teacher Attitude Survey (described below) at three different points during the school year. This report deals only with the results of the first phase of the study. Approximately 30% of teachers contacted participated in this phase of the study.

Measures

The measure used in the study--the Teacher Attitude Survey (TAS)--is a modified version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). This latter instrument, originally developed by Maslach and Jackson (1981), has been used extensively to assess burnout in a wide variety of human service professionals. The first section requests basic demographic and job-related data. The balance of this measure consists of 25 statements about professional work. Each statement is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale for both intensity and frequency of agreement. For the purposes of the present study, the 25 items on the MBI were augmented with 40 additional items of exclusive relevance to teachers. These

items were chosen to represent the range of satisfactions and stresses in teaching most often noted in the literature. The correlation between the original 25 items on the MBI and the 40 additional items was .82.

Data obtained from the 65-item TAS were analyzed in several ways. Each item on the TAS was rank-ordered according to both frequency and intensity. Additionally, in order to get a more conceptually integrated view of the results of the TAS, principal components factor analysis with varimax rotations was performed on the frequency dimension. Data from the resulting three factors were then subjected to statistical analyses (one-way ANOVAs) along various demographic and ecological dimensions: sex, age, marital status, number of children living at home, highest degree obtained, experience (or not) in another career, number of years teaching, number of years at present school, grade level taught, average number of children in classes taught, number of teachers in school, and number of students enrolled in school.

Results

Insert Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 about here

As Tables 1 and 3 indicate, the most frequent and most intense sources of satisfaction for teachers in the present sample consist primarily of experiences that make them feel sensitive to and involved with students (e.g., "I could easily understand how my students have felt about things") as well as experiences that make them feel competent, important, and committed to their jobs (e.g., "I have dealt very effectively with the problems of my students"; "I have felt I was positively influencing students' lives through my work"; "I have felt a

total commitment to teaching"). An additional source of satisfaction consisted of rewarding contact with colleagues during the school day. Finally, teachers indicated that, to a great extent, they had time and energy for friends, family and outside activities.

In contrast to other studies that have indicated that student discipline problems and involuntary transfers are primary sources of teacher stress, the data of the present study (see Tables 2 and 4) suggest that these problems are not prime concerns of suburban teachers. Instead, the teachers in the present study resented most strongly excessive paperwork, unsuccessful administrative meetings, and the lack of advancement opportunities in teaching.

A major problem in presenting and interpreting mean scores is that trends are lost. For example, the mean score on the item "I feel burned out from my work" was 1.9--fairly low. One could conclude that teachers, in general, do not feel burned out. And while this conclusion would be "correct" it would also be somewhat misleading, for, in fact, there is a sizable minority of teachers who indicate quite strongly that they are feeling burned out. On a 7-point scale (0=never; 1-2=rarely; 3-4=occasionally; 5-6=frequently) 70% of teachers indicated that they either never felt burned out or rarely felt burned out; 18.5% indicated that they occasionally felt burned out; and 10.3% felt as if they frequently felt burned out. Similarly, whereas 55% of teachers frequently thought they could "create a relaxed atmosphere" with their students, 32% thought they could do this only occasionally and 11% thought they could accomplish this either rarely or never. It is often more informative therefore to report group scores in terms of frequencies rather than means. Viewed this way, other items on the scale yield interesting data. Whereas 55% of teachers indicated that they either never or rarely feel "emotionally drained" from their work, an additional

30% have felt emotionally drained occasionally, and 13.4% have frequently felt they were emotionally drained. Similarly, whereas 41% of teachers never or rarely "feel used up at the end of the workday," 40% occasionally feel this way, and 18.4% frequently feel this way. In terms of total commitment to teaching--10% never feel a total commitment and 29% either never or rarely feel it; 27% occasionally feel it and 42% feel it frequently. "I gain suitable emotional rewards from teaching given the effort I put in"--11.3% never feel this way and a total of 36% either never or rarely; 29% occasionally, and 32% frequently.

Would teachers in this sample choose to become teachers if they had to do it again? 21% indicated that they never felt this way, and a total of 48% said that they have felt this way either never or only rarely; only 30.4% of teachers reported that they frequently felt this way. One of the reasons perhaps for this dissatisfaction is that most teachers do not feel as if they were adequately prepared for the stresses of teaching: 71% indicated that they either never or rarely felt as if they were adequately prepared; and only 15% often felt that their preparation was adequate. In addition, only 5.5% of teachers frequently feel as if parents have made things easier for them; a total of 67.4% of teachers never or rarely feel that parents have made things easier. In this regard too, one of the most skewed items on the survey was "I have felt satisfied with teachers' standing in today's society": 81% of teachers never or rarely felt this way; only 6% felt frequently satisfied with society's opinions of teachers. Similarly, 73.4% of teachers are never or rarely satisfied with their salaries; only 10% are frequently satisfied. Principals and administrators are also not seen as improving the quality of teachers' jobs. Over 86% of teachers thought that administrative meetings never or rarely proved helpful in solving the problems teachers face; and 62.4% thought they rarely or never had rewarding

contact with their principals. Overall, do the benefits of teaching outweigh the disadvantages? There is virtually an even distribution of opinion: 35% rarely or never think so; 33% occasionally think so; and 30% frequently think so.

As to whether teachers have rewarding contacts with their colleagues: Almost 26% of teachers feel this is never or only rarely the case; 40%, however, feel this is frequently the case. Even more dramatically, 60.5% of teachers say that they either never or rarely feel there is a sense of community in their schools; only 14.8% frequently perceive a sense of community.

Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotations was also performed on the entire 65-item Teacher Attitude Survey. Three major factors--each comprised of items loading .45 or higher--emerged. The first factor, accounting for 47.2% of the variance, consists of items that reflect general feelings of burnout, e.g., "I feel emotionally drained from my work," "I feel used up at the end of the workday," "I have worried that this job is hardening me emotionally." The second factor, accounting for 27.7% of the variance, includes items that suggest a feeling of commitment to the teaching profession, e.g., "I am satisfied with teachers' standing in society," "I see myself continuing to teach for the rest of my career," "If I had to do it again, I would still choose to become a teacher." And the third factor, accounting for 8.0% of the variance, has as its core, items dealing with the gratification in working closely and effectively with students, e.g., "I have felt I was positively influencing students' lives through my work," "I could easily understand how my students felt about things," "I have accomplished many worthwhile things on my job." In constructing factor scale scores, scoring for items on factors 2 and 3 were reversed so that for all three factors the higher the score the greater

the indication of dysfunctional feelings (of burnout, lack of commitment, and lack of gratification). Internal reliability of each factor was high--alpha values ranged from .86 to .92.

Somewhat surprisingly, although consistent with the previous research of Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978), there were few significant subgroup differences with regard to these factors. Teachers' perceptions of their work experience--as defined by these three factors--did not differ as a function of sex, marital status, number of children living at home, highest degree obtained, experience in other careers, number of years teaching, number of years at present school, average number of children in classes taught, and number of teachers in school.

However, some significant subgroup differences did emerge, most notably in terms of age, grade level taught, and schoolwide student population. Age significantly affected teachers' sense of commitment to their profession (Factor 2), F (2,395) = 9.11, $p < .001$. Tukey multiple range tests at the .05 level revealed that teachers in the 34-44 year-old age group perceived themselves as less committed to teaching than did teachers in either the younger (21-33) or older (45-65) age categories. Age also significantly affected the overall level of dissatisfaction with teaching as measured by the total score on all three factors, F (2,395) = 4.98, $p < .01$. Respondents in the 34-44 year-old age group again had the higher combined score on all three factors, although Tukey tests revealed that this group significantly differed only from the higher age group. The grade level at which teachers work also emerged as a significant variable affecting teachers' feelings of commitment to their profession (Factor 2), F (2,395) = 6.58, $p < .01$; their feelings of gratification in working with students (Factor 3), F (2,195) = 5.48, $p < .01$; and their general dissatisfaction with teaching (Factors 1, 2, 3), F (2,395) = 6.55, $p < .01$. The data

reveal that working in junior high or middle schools is particularly stressful. Tukey tests showed that, in comparison to elementary school teachers, those working in junior high or middle school schools had significantly higher overall scores on the combined factors as well as significantly higher scores on Factors 2 and 3. School population also significantly affects teachers' feelings of commitment toward their work (Factor 2), F (2,395) = 3.65, $p < .05$, and their overall dissatisfaction with teaching (Factors, 1, 2, 3), F (2,395) = 4.17, $p < .05$. Tukey tests revealed that on both these measures, those working in schools with over 1,000 students had significantly higher scores than those teachers working in schools with less than 600 students. Finally, the correlations among the factors suggest that feelings of burnout are significantly related to teachers' lack of commitment to their profession (correlation between these factors of .49), and a lack of satisfaction and gratification in working with students (correlation of .42).

Discussion

The results of this study must proceed with several considerations in mind. First, the great majority of teachers in this study work in suburban schools. The sample, therefore, does not accurately represent the diversity of settings in which this nation's teachers work and generalizations based on the present data, therefore, to the teaching profession as a whole are unwarranted. Second, the 30% return on the sample, while not unusual in survey research, leaves open the question as to how representative the present sample is of suburban teachers. The sample might include disproportionate numbers of exceptionally satisfied (or exceptionally stressed) teachers. Third, the study of teacher stress and burnout should optimally be carried out on a longitudinal basis. As Sarason (1977) has

noted, "work is not a 'here and now phenomenon' unrooted in a perceived past and future" (p. 21). Indeed, a comprehensive understanding of the results of this study must await the results of the other two phases of this project.

Confusion in the media (and in professional journals) regarding the distinction between stress and burnout has, unfortunately, perpetuated a false image of teachers--namely, that virtually all are burned out. Though most, if not all, teachers are stressed by the very nature of their work, the results of the present study suggest that teachers--at least those in suburbia--are not suffering from the usual symptoms of burnout, i.e., attitudinal, physical, and emotional exhaustion. As a group, the teachers in the present study have not lessened their involvement in work, do not feel that teaching has hardened emotionally, and do not experience any deterioration of their physical health. For the most part, these teachers are still committed, caring, and healthy.

It is, however, unsettling to consider that over 86% of teachers surveyed felt that administrative meetings were unhelpful in solving the problems of teachers. This finding corroborates Cichon and Koff's (1978) finding that "management tension" is a significant source of stress for teachers, and also lends support to the idea that the critical deficit in the burnout process is a lack of organizational support (Fibkins, in press; Ianni & Reuss-Ianni, in press). Fibkins (in press), for example, contends that teacher burnout is the result of the school organization's lack of responsivity to the complicated and increasingly pressured aspects of teachers' work. In the present study, the comments that some teachers included on their returned survey forms suggest that administrators, including principals, are not perceived as being on the "same side" as teachers, and that they (the administrators) are more interested in protecting their own images and positions than they are in improving school

conditions for either teachers or students. Administrators, these teachers feel, prefer teachers who "don't make waves" and don't have problems. It may be that administrators are caught in the dilemma of either being active in the school (thereby risking charges of intrusiveness) or being in the background (thereby risking charges of neglect of duties). It certainly bears keeping in mind that administrators too are vulnerable to their own versions of stress and burnout. Still, the data of the present study suggest that, at least in suburbia, administrators have swung too far to the background and are perceived as being uninvolved, or at best, only perfunctorily and nonhelpfully involved in the daily work of teachers. It may be that, as some teachers suggest, administrators, having once been teachers themselves, have "turned their backs" on their former colleagues to safeguard their own positions. However, alternative explanations of teachers' unflattering views of administrators are equally plausible. For example, a form of psychological displacement may be occurring: that just as some parents have unrealistic and unfair expectations of what teachers can accomplish for their children, so do some teachers have somewhat unrealistic and unfair expectations of what administrators can accomplish for them.

It is also interesting to note that teachers do not generally experience a "psychological sense of community" (Sarason, 1974), though they do experience rewarding contacts with colleagues. In response perhaps to the perceived insensitivity and criticism of administrators and the general public, teachers have retreated and isolated themselves somewhat. Satisfactions occur on a micro rather than macro level; the school as a whole (especially administrators) and the community at large are not sources of satisfaction whereas students and selected colleagues are. This study, therefore, confirms Sarason's (1971) notion of teaching as "a lonely profession."

Eisenstat and Felner (1981a, b) have shown that in certain human service jobs, job stressors do not significantly affect workers' motivation (i.e., their feelings of job involvement) but, instead, have a very great influence on workers' levels of emotional exhaustion. The results of the present study, however, suggest that feelings of burnout among teachers do significantly covary with lack of commitment to the teaching profession and to a lack of satisfaction in working with students. Therefore, though we still do not know whether teachers work less hard and less effectively as a result of burnout, the present data suggest that burnout significantly lessens teachers' motivation to continue in the profession and lessens too the basic satisfaction inherent in the student-teacher relationship.

What conclusion then about suburban teachers may we draw at this time? That many are committed to teaching, that their motivation for continuing in the field consists of positive, rewarding contact with students; that their stresses are often dealt with either through the support of colleagues in school or the support of friends or family at home; and that principals and administrators (as well as parents and the general public) are still perceived as essentially nonhelpful. As this study also points out, however, the dangers of oversimplification and overgeneralization of data. While it is true that we can point to general trends, it is also true that there is considerable variability in the data--teachers are not a homogeneous group. An important example in this regard is the finding that there are a substantial minority of teachers--perhaps 20-25% who are vulnerable to burnout, and probably 10-15% who are already burned out. Particularly vulnerable are those at a certain age level (34-44), those teaching at a junior high school level, and those teaching in schools with many (more than 1,000) students. These findings are consistent with the results of the

1979 New York State United Teachers survey ("Stress," 1979) that found that teachers in the 31-40 year-old range are most stressed and that in suburban and rural schools teachers in middle or junior high schools are under greater stress than those teaching at the elementary or high school level. Perhaps because teachers in their 30's or 40's are most involved in putting down "final roots," i.e., committing themselves to their profession, values, family, and community, they are most vulnerable to self-doubts regarding the wisdom of their career choice. This group too is most "locked into" teaching--feeling too old and unprepared to change careers, yet too young to think about retirement. In addition, economic conditions today, in particular the nature of the job market, has made leaving teaching extremely difficult even for those who have decided they must. It is significant too that teachers working in schools with large student populations feel more stressed by their work. In such schools the potential for problems is probably greater and the establishment of schoolwide or community wide support networks is more difficult. This finding therefore lends credence to the notion that a psychological sense of community may mitigate the impact of stressful working conditions for teachers (cf. Farber & Miller, 1981). It suggests too the value of teacher centers (Fibkins, in press; Sparks, 1979) and of self-help support groups for teachers (cf. Walley & Stokes, 1981)--approaches which have proven successful in reducing isolation, promoting collegial support, renewing commitment, and increasing teachers' sense of professionalism.

While burnout may not be as widespread a problem (at least in the suburbs) as previously assumed, the identification of a subgroup of burned out and disillusioned teachers deserved our most serious attention--for the sake not only of these teachers and their students but of their colleagues and families as well.

Table 1. The most highly-ranked items in terms of frequency.

	Mean (0-6 Scale)
I could easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.	4.6
I could easily understand how my students have felt about things.	4.3
I have dealt very effectively with the problems of my students.	4.1
I have had time and energy for friends and family.	4.1
I have felt I was positively influencing students' lives through my work.	3.9
I have accomplished many worthwhile things on this job.	3.9
I have had rewarding contact with my colleagues during the work day.	3.9
I have felt exhilarated after working closely with my students.	3.8
I have felt very energetic.	3.7
I have felt a total commitment to teaching.	3.7
I have been involved in outside activities which are as important to me as teaching.	3.7
I have resented the paperwork and other non-teaching duties that eat up my time and energy.	3.6

Table 2. The lowest-ranked items in terms of frequency.

	Mean (0-6 Scale)
I have feared for my personal safety on the job.	0.3
I have refrained from disciplining students for fear they would retaliate.	0.4
I have been upset by the anticipation of being involuntarily transferred to another school.	0.6
I have found myself consuming an increased amount of alcohol and/or drugs as compared to the amounts I consumed before becoming a teacher.	0.6
I have been encouraged by the opportunities for advancement within the teaching profession.	0.6
I have felt my physical health has deteriorated as a result of teaching.	1.0
I have felt that administrative meetings prove helpful in solving the problems teachers face.	1.0
I haven't really cared what happens to some students.	1.0
I have felt that parents have unjustly blamed me for their children's problems.	1.1
I have felt like I'm at the end of my rope.	1.1
I have worried that this job is hardening me emotionally.	1.1
I have felt that I have become more callous toward people since I took this job.	1.1
I have felt I treated some students as if they were impersonal "objects."	1.1

Table 3. The most highly-ranked items in terms of intensity.

	Mean (1-7 Scale)
I have been involved in outside activities which are as important to me as teaching.	5.5
I could easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my students.	5.4
I have felt a total commitment to teaching.	5.3
I have resented the paperwork and other non-teaching duties that eat up my time and energy.	5.3
I have felt exhilarated after working closely with my students.	5.2
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.	5.2
I have felt that if I had to do it all over, I would still choose to be a teacher.	5.2
I have dealt very effectively with the problems of my students.	5.1
I have felt very energetic.	5.2

Table 4. The lowest-ranked items in terms of intensity.

	Mean (1-7 Scale)
I have been encouraged by the opportunities for advancement within the teaching profession.	2.9
I have felt that administrative meetings prove helpful in solving the problems teachers face.	3.0
I have felt I treated some students as if they were impersonal "objects."	3.0
I have found myself consuming an increased amount of alcohol/drugs.	3.2
I have felt uncomfortable about the way I have treated some students.	3.2
I have felt students blame me for some of their problems.	3.3
I haven't really cared what happens to some students.	3.3
I have spent the minimum of time in preparing my lesson plans or other such tasks.	3.5
I have felt that parents have unjustly blamed me for their children's problems.	3.5
I have feared for my personal safety on the job.	3.5
I have felt that I have become more callous toward people since I took this job.	3.5
I have felt that working with people all day was really a strain for me.	3.5

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